

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE VI.

THE AFFINITY OF SCIENCE FOR CHRISTIANITY.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR G. FREDERICK WRIGHT, D.D., LL.D.,
OBERLIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

NOTWITHSTANDING all that is said in some quarters about the intolerance and bigotry of the preachers and priests of the Christian religion, it still remains an indisputable fact that science has never found a home outside the nurturing influences of Christianity, and that a controlling belief in the cardinal facts of the Christian religion has in no age spread so rapidly and prevailed so extensively as during the remarkable period of scientific progress which makes pre-eminent the nineteenth century of the Christian era. Taking the United States as a fair example of a field in which science has had an ample scope both for influence and development, we find that, alongside the remarkable strides of science and invention, there has been an equally remarkable reinvigoration of Christian life and activity. Rapid as has been the increase of population since the beginning of the century, the increase of the evangelical church membership has been far more rapid; so that the ratio of church membership to population is now three and one-half times greater than at the beginning of the century. Then it was one to fourteen and one-half; now it is one to four and four-fifths.¹ Nor is there any apparent deterioration in the quality of the membership. The constancy and devotion of church members to the work of spreading the gospel were never

¹ *Dorchester, Christianity in the United States*, p. 750.

so great as at the present time. The contributions to the great missionary societies have been increasing in rapid ratio, and the alacrity of the talented young men and women in the colleges of the land to volunteer for foreign missionary service rivals that of the apostolic period itself. No less than four thousand such volunteers are now enrolled in the institutions of higher learning in the United States.

Doubtless many will be inclined to ascribe this simultaneous development of Christian life and scientific activity to a mere coincidence; but mature reflection indicates that it is more than a coincidence, and compels the inference that Christianity is, in an important sense, a cause, or at least a necessary condition, of the highest development of science. The explanation of this probably lies in the fact, that Christianity, unlike all other religious systems, is itself a science; that it rests on facts which from generation to generation continue to demand scientific proof, and so in a pre-eminent manner familiarizes its votaries with the principles of inductive reasoning. In justifying this view of the case, however, it is necessary to make a distinction between Christianity and its temporary representatives, just as at all times it is necessary to make a distinction between science and the temporary representatives of science. The public is constantly in danger of being imposed upon by a spurious Christianity, just as, according to the sacred writers, the world is in danger of being imposed upon by a science which is falsely so called. In every generation there are individual preachers and priests who, by factious opposition to the progress of scientific truth, virtually deny the Lord who bought them, just as in every generation there are cliques of scientific men who discredit the principles of inductive logic by a factious opposition to the truths of Christianity. Examination, however, will show that both these classes of errorists have been building better than they knew; for, in the last resort, it is found that the exigencies of the

Christian apologist compel him to magnify the foundation principles of inductive science, while the scientific advocate is likewise compelled to exalt the force and dignity of that species of probable evidence by means of which the Christian apologist gains such a vantage ground.

Nor is it any humiliating concession to make this acknowledgment concerning the fallibility of individual Christian teachers, for it is Christianity, and not its temporary representatives, that inspires the hope and challenges the admiration of mankind. And indeed it is a satisfaction for the believer to reflect that the more limited and fallible the workmen, the more conspicuous becomes the ability of the Master Workman. The advocate is fortunate who has a case so clear and of such absorbing interest that it, of itself, even with the most imperfect presentation, rivets attention and carries conviction. Such is the happy condition of the Christian teacher. The conceptions of Christianity are at once so reasonable, so grand, and so comprehensive that their influence is not to any great extent determined by the *manner* of their presentation. The fashion of the dress cannot augment, nor can it to any great extent obscure, the native beauty of the system itself. The gold of Christianity is so pure and so massive in its amount, that, however much of wood, hay, and stubble the builders may have mingled with the temple constructed from it, the value cannot be destroyed, for, though tried in the fire, the precious metal still remains.

As just remarked, the connection between modern science and the return of the church to the primitive simplicity of its original founders is too close to be wholly fortuitous. It is not necessary, in this connection, to determine which has been cause and which effect in this rapid development both of Christian activity and of enterprise and success in scientific discovery; but it should not be forgotten that a remarkable proportion of the leaders in the scientific progress of the last few centuries

have been children of the church, and have lived and died in loyal devotion to its interests.

It is well to remember that Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Tycho Brahe, and Sir Isaac Newton were devoted disciples of the Christian religion, as well as the founders of modern astronomical science. Among the more recent leaders in scientific advancement who have also been, at the same time, in thorough sympathy with the Christian thought of the age are, among astronomers, the Herschels, Benjamin Pierce, Secchi, and Professor Young; among physicists, Sir Humphry Davy, Silliman, Faraday, and Clerk Maxwell; among naturalists, Cuvier and Owen; among botanists, Asa Gray and Torrey; among geologists, Sir Roderick Murchison, Hugh Miller, President Hitchcock, and Guyot, to say nothing of such living representatives as Dawson, Dana, Charles Hitchcock, the Winchells, Le Conte, and others.

Another indirect evidence of the close relationship of Christianity with the methods of modern science appears in the number of Christian ministers and of those who were educated for the ministry who have been foremost in promoting it. It is a singular commentary upon some modern ideas of education, that so many of the foremost students and discoverers in natural history should have been educated for the pulpit. In the United States two of the most successful state geologists, Professor Lesley of Pennsylvania and Professor Orton of Ohio, were educated for the ministry and in their early life were engaged in its active duties; while in England, Pye Smith, Adam Sedgwick, and Henslow were clergymen, as well as men of science of the highest reputation, and even Charles Darwin was educated for that profession, and had to lament the degree to which his years spent in preparation for the church unfitted him for success in the field of natural history! Guyot and Agassiz were also sons of clergymen, and Guyot fitted himself for the work of the ministry by a long course of study at the feet of the

greatest theologians of Germany. Of course it would be too much to say that a theological education is ordinarily the best preparation for a scientific career. But, on the other hand, the coincidence of great attainments both in science and in knowledge of Christian doctrines is certainly significant. The secret of this coincidence lies probably in the broad fact enunciated by Christ, that he came to bear witness to the truth, and that his followers are, first of all, lovers of truth. Our Lord came to bear witness to the truth. It should be observed, also, that Christ, as becomes a witness of the truth, submitted his testimony to every form of verification and cross-examination. His followers were asked to believe him not for his words only, but for his works. The truths concerning the future world which he spoke were of most far-reaching and startling significance, too important by far to be accepted as the ground of action, unless established by a threefold cord that could not be broken. Therefore it was that when Jesus announced to the paralytic that his sins were forgiven, he confirmed his words by a miracle, observing that it was easy enough for anybody to say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," whereas the verification of the words was not so easy. Our Lord therefore proceeded to utter some other words which equally needed verification, and which were capable of being verified only in case he himself was endowed with power such as to make him authority in that hidden realm of nature where forgiveness of sins may also be provided for. Whereupon Christ said to the palsied man, whose limbs for forty years had refused response to the volitional energies of the sufferer, "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk," and he arose, took up his bed before them all, and went to his home. This was done, the Saviour said, that they might know that the Son of man had power to forgive sins also.

It is in this readiness of the Christian religion to submit itself to the ordinary tests of inductive science, that we

find its affinity with the spirit of modern investigation. Christianity is an inductive science, and it submits itself to a remarkable series of inductive verifications. Unlike every other system of religion, Christianity is based upon a remarkable series of objective facts alleged to have taken place in a most public manner, in the presence of as acute critics as the world has ever known, and amid circumstances eminently fitted to disclose any weakness in the chain of evidence supporting its claims. Moreover, from the beginning, Christianity has been subjected to every form of verification, and every generation of believers is trained in the study of the evidences upon which their faith rests, and is called upon to give a reason for the hope that is within them.

The importance of this in its bearing upon scientific progress, it is difficult to overestimate, for it necessitates the training of Christian teachers in all the essential elements of inductive logic, and familiarizes them at the start, with the significance of circumstantial evidence. Hence it must be considered as really one of the most fortunate experiences of Mr. Darwin's life that, in the course of his education, it came in his way thoroughly to master Paley's "Evidences of Christianity," a book most perfect in its method of argument and most admirable in its literary style.

In justification of these statements concerning the scientific character of the Christian system, attention may be directed, first, to the inductive nature of the general evidences upon which the credibility of the system is maintained. As before intimated, it is, in this connection, a point of supreme significance that Christianity is an historical religion. As a system it is anchored to a reported fact. That fact is the resurrection of Christ. If Christ be not raised from the dead, our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins. Christian apologists in all ages assume the burden of proving the occurrence of a notable miracle. By many this is deemed an unfortu-

nate circumstance, and it is said that the miracles of the Bible, instead of being an aid to Christianity, are rather a burden upon its evidences. It may be readily granted that, in one sense of the word, the miracles of the Bible are a burden. They are hard to prove. But it can easily be shown that, in the end, this very difficulty of proof is an advantage in every respect. In this it conforms to all other good things which the Creator has bestowed upon the human race. A high degree of excellence can nowhere be attained without great labor. The great discoveries of science have in all cases been the reward of infinite patience and labor on the part of their discoverers. Nor can any one fully comprehend these great discoveries and the laws of nature which they concern without laborious investigation and study. The inductive sciences are not mastered by intuition, but by a toilsome collection of facts and a constant dependence upon human testimony.

The difficulties created by the miraculous character of Christianity may be compared to those assumed by a builder when great permanence is desired in the structure erected. It is easier to lay the foundation of a temporary structure than of one which is to endure for the ages. But the burdens of providing a broader and more solid foundation are not those which the far-sighted architect evades. So, also, the wise advocate of Christianity is not willing to content himself with any superficial and merely *ad hominem* defence of the Christian system. We reject, therefore, as essentially suicidal, the effort, commended by some, to defend Christianity by a mere appeal to man's ethical judgments. Practically, this is the reduction of Christian theology to the narrow limits of natural religion.

The crowning glory of Christianity consists in its ability to sustain the hope of the human race in the presence of a series of stern and most startling realities. The very capacities of the human soul for scientific discovery

reveal the essential greatness of its nature. The human soul is built for a longer voyage than is open to it on the stream of any man's earthly life. In the midst of his days, and in the very beginning of the development of his powers, man's earthly life is sure to be cut off. Socrates with the light of nature barely *hoped* that he might live beyond the grave of his martyrdom, and the devotees of modern physical science can attain no higher degree of certainty. Every human being that comes into the world launches his frail craft upon an unknown sea, and hastens to a country from whose bourne no traveller returns. Physical science cannot lift the veil that hangs between man and the endless future. And so great are these realities, that it is impossible for any man to look with indifference upon them. The bare possibility that there is a future endless life, and that one's conduct and development in this life may affect the conditions of his future life, invests everything here with supreme importance. Especially is this the case in view of the fact that conscience makes cowards of us all. Amid the distractions of man's earthly life, it is no easy matter for the message of divine mercy to reach the soul and carry conviction to its inner court of appeal. With regard to these realities of the future world, there can be no satisfying conviction apart from a direct revelation of the Creator, for to Him alone belongs the prerogative of seeing the end from the beginning.

Most glorious and inspiring are the hopes of the Christian believer. With unwavering assurance he believes in the merciful character of the Creator, in the forgiveness of sins, and the life everlasting. By reason of the admonitions of conscience there is to all mankind a fearful looking forward to the judgment of a righteous God. But in the Bible the grandest conceivable scheme of mercy is brought to light, the forebodings of conscience are quieted, and faith is supported by a special revelation of an atonement whereby God as a righteous ruler can be

both just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

“Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory.” (1 Tim. iii. 16.) The question is, How shall such transforming ideas find lodgment in the human mind? How can a messenger bearing them be duly accredited before the bar of human reason? From the nature of the case these messages are beyond the reach of direct verification, inasmuch as they pertain to a field which it is impossible for man directly to explore. He is compelled, therefore, to form an opinion concerning them upon such evidence as he has, and to demand appropriate credentials of the messenger. These credentials cannot well be less than the possession of miraculous power. The human reason rightly demands of an ambassador coming from the unseen world, that he should exhibit his commission by some supernatural signs. This demand of human reason, the Founder of the Christian system bodily accepted; and the foundations of the Christian church were laid in a cluster of notable miracles centring in the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Returning to the scientific bearing of this fact, we observe, that because the doctrines of the gospel cannot be subjected to direct verification, and because they pertain, like the reports of travellers from a newly discovered country, to a region which we have not visited, and which we are not permitted to visit and return, therefore, they are hard to prove, and it is of the highest importance, before the bar of reason, that those who brought those doctrines should have subjected themselves to the necessity of making the world believe in miracles, the reality of which could be tested and verified. Thus it is a matter of supreme importance that Christianity at its initiation was compelled to subject its supernatural assumptions to the closest scrutiny. Such a miracle as the resurrection

of Christ is hard to prove. But it was proved to the satisfaction of the great numbers who during that generation staked their lives upon maintaining the doctrines which it brought to light, and it can be proved at the present time, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, to the satisfaction of the great majority of serious students of science and history. The origin of Christianity cannot be explained except on the theory that Christ rose from the dead, and thus, at the very outset, every Christian believer is compelled to grapple with and master the elements of a great historical problem, and to learn both the strength and weakness of circumstantial evidence.

In this aspect of the case Christian evidence belongs among the natural sciences. But here it is important to remark, that the natural sciences are by no means all alike in their methods of proof. The principles of chemistry, for example, are verified by experiment, but the principles of astronomy are established by a comparison of observations and by study of the record of past observations. With the present applications of photography the preservation of the records of the past is to be made as nearly perfect as it is possible to imagine. But a well-defined class of the sciences are purely historical. Such are geology, astronomy so far as it pertains to the origin of worlds, biology so far as it pertains to the origin and development of life, anthropology so far as it considers the causes which have led the human race into its present conditions of abode and development. In one aspect of the case the problem of Christianity is a problem of classification. With scientific insight, Dr. Bushnell labelled one of his sermons, "The Impossibility of classifying Christ among Men." The historical question involved in Christianity relates to the origin of the belief in the resurrection of Christ, and in discussing the evidence bearing upon this we are dealing with known quantities. The student of history has a well-defined knowledge of the

limitations of human testimony. Whatever views one may hold with reference to the freedom of the human will, he must grant that man himself belongs to the system of nature. The freedom of his action is confined within a very contracted sphere. The freedom of the will is like the freedom of the engineer upon a locomotive: he can go forwards or backwards, but he cannot range at will over the fields. It is like the freedom of the bird in the air or of the fish in the sea: it cannot ignore the element in which it is ordained to move. Thus in many ways are the limitations known under which the human will is compelled to move. It is, for example, impossible for one man exactly to simulate the handwriting of another. However strongly the will may command the muscles of the hand to imitate another man's signature, the muscles cannot be made to do it. Nature will assert itself. The individuality of the forger will appear. So it is a proverb, that murder will out. The criminal cannot perfectly cover his tracks, and blot out all the evidence of his crime. The detection of forgery and the unmasking of crime by means of circumstantial evidence rest on scientific principles. We know the limitations under which fraud is committed. With these same principles in their larger applications, are we permitted to approach the study of Christian evidences.

If, for example, we deny the truth of the gospel history, we are compelled to ascribe to the human will an independence of natural limiting conditions which demonstrably it does not have. It is far easier to believe in the truth of the gospel history than to accept any theory of fraud or delusion. The credulous people are not those who accept the gospel history, but those who attempt to explain it away. In this light it is profitable to consider what is involved in a denial of, or, in the more fashionable phrase, a state of agnosticism respecting the authenticity of the Gospels. If, in the explanation of this history, one chooses the alternative of considering it the

result of conscious fraud, it requires but little consideration to show that the fraud was of such gigantic proportions, and involved so widespread a conspiracy, that its perpetration and successful maintenance are inconceivable. It is against all the known facts of human nature, that the sceptical Romans and the hostile Jews should have been so grossly imposed upon by the early disciples as they were if the story of the resurrection of Christ was not true. A full defence of this proposition would require us to enter into details for which we have not space within present limits. We content ourselves with simply remarking, that the circumstances are altogether unique. The transactions were open to investigation, were of the most notable and specific character, and their reality was maintained with such remarkable persistency that unbelievers could never find any flaw in the evidence, and were unable to prevail against it. If the story was a fraud, the bubble was so gigantic that it could have been easily pricked; and it is difficult to conceive of circumstances in which there should have been a greater desire on the part of its opponents to expose a fraud, and greater opportunity to do so, than then existed. So clear is this, that few people at the present time think of ascribing conscious fraud to the apostles.

The other alternative by which the truth of the gospel history can be discredited, involves delusion of one sort or another. But any variety of this hypothesis, when it comes to be worked out in detail, involves delusion on such a gigantic scale that it becomes the height of credulity to accept the theory. Suppose it be granted that there was a delusion concerning the facts relative to the death and resurrection of Christ: the same difficulties arise, with reference to the maintenance of such a delusion in the presence of active opponents, as arose in regard to the theory of fraud. If the apostles were laboring under any form of delusion respecting these fundamental facts, they were enormously deluded. They were

deluded not with respect to facts far distant in time and space, but with reference to facts right at hand and open to inspection. Men who are thus deluded are not in a state of mind to bear cross-examination, to build up a system of faith that shall command the respect of the most enlightened portion of future ages, and to write such sober histories of their hero as are found in the New Testament. The earmarks of such gigantic delusion could not fail to show themselves. Delusion intoxicates the mind as various drugs intoxicate the body. It is as easy to detect insanity as drunkenness. An alienist may be as scientific as a toxicologist.

Considered from this point of view, there is nothing in all the range of literature so astonishing as the self-restraint of the historical writers of the New Testament. The scientific student of the New Testament history is compelled to believe in a miracle of one sort or another. It is not a question of miracle or no miracle, but an alternative between the miracle of the resurrection and the miracle of the production of the gospel history by writers laboring under an enormous delusion as to fundamental facts. These writers believed that Jesus Christ was a supernatural being, that all power both in heaven and on earth was in his hands; that he could heal the sick, could raise the dead, could still the tempest by his word, and could multiply a few small loaves and fishes till thousands should feed upon them and have their hunger satisfied, and there be twelve baskets of fragments to spare. That, with such a conception of their hero, there should exist the recorded limitations to the exercise of Christ's miraculous power, stamps the story as truth, and not fiction. It is beyond the natural capacity of the human mind to entertain such a belief as the apostles had respecting Christ's power, without its running away with them and unbalancing their judgment. It is inconceivable that men who were deluded to the extent here indicated, should not have shown signs of delusion at every point of

the narrative. And yet how natural is the account of the ordinary course of the Saviour's life! How simple is the story of his childhood! With what marvellous self-restraint did they pass over the whole period of his youth and adolescent manhood! A carpenter till he was thirty years of age, with nothing to distinguish him from his fellows but his knowledge of the law, and his obedience to his parents and the recognized conditions of his sphere. It is inconceivable that writers under any form of delusion, and entertaining such views as this concerning the glory and power of their central figure, should not have said more concerning the earlier part of his life, and decked it out with the gaudy colors of their diseased imaginations. It is inconceivable, further, that writers laboring under such delusion should not have made a monstrosity out of the whole earthly career of the Saviour. But the very opposite of this is the case.

For example, the evangelists do not comment upon the constant refusal of Christ to perform miracles for his own advantage. Nevertheless, this characteristic of his conduct appears in a conspicuous but incidental manner. The same writer that describes him as feeding the hungry thousands describes him as sitting helpless at the mouth of Jacob's well, waiting for food to be brought to him from the city, and for a bucket with which water could be drawn from the well. The same writer that represents him as raising Lazarus from the dead represents him as providing for his weeping mother as she stood at the foot of the cross, by commending her to the care of one of his well-to-do disciples. The world cannot believe that such a history is either legendary or mythical. There is nothing else like it in literature. Its growth as a legend or a myth contradicts all the laws of the human mind.

Such is the central line of defence of the gospel history. The presentation of these facts forms the staple of all Christian preaching and teaching, and familiarizes the

mass of Christian believers with a legitimate and most important process of inductive investigation. The Gospel histories carry on their face and in themselves their most convincing credentials. Let any one carefully read and study the Gospels, and then, by any hypotheses however ingenious, attempt deductively to account for them, and he will find himself at last reduced to the conviction that the history is true, and that Christ is what he is believed to be by the mass of his followers. The inductive philosopher when confronted by rival hypotheses concerning the New Testament, and tempted to abandon the defence of its history, is compelled to exclaim with the disciples of old, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life!"

And this central portion of the argument is sustained, also, by a vast amount of corroborative evidence attesting the accuracy of the Gospels in their numerous incidental allusions to contemporary events, showing that they cannot have been written later than the first century. The fraud, or the delusion, or the fact, whatever it was, was developed in its full proportions during the lifetime of the generation living when Christ was crucified. It is important to notice that this proof of the genuineness of the Gospels is an inductive process. The intelligent defender of the *authenticity* of the New Testament is compelled to familiarize himself, at every step, with all the principles of inductive logic. He studies the documents before him; he familiarizes himself with the contemporary history, with the social and political conditions of the times, and with the geography of the regions concerned. He considers the natural limitations under which the historian proceeds, especially if he be attempting to impersonate writers of an earlier time. His *vera causa* is the known limitations to the capacity of the historian, and they are such as to render incredible the hypothesis that the books of the New Testament were produced at any time subsequent to the first century. This constitutes the department

of canonicity, and it is a scientific process from beginning to end, with which every Christian apologist must familiarize himself.

Again, there is not only the authenticity, but the *integrity*, of the Christian documents to maintain. There has been in recent years a remarkable revival of interest in the question of determining the true text of the New Testament documents. The autographs of the writers are no longer in existence. At the best, there remain only manuscripts and versions and quotations, made some time subsequent to the apostolic age. But the art of textual criticism has developed into a science. From the known limitations of the human mind one can determine in a mass of variations which ones are most likely to arise from the mistakes of transcribers. In short, he can get the personal equation of a copyist by the same process that the astronomers determine the personal equation of an observer. No man can become familiar with the processes in vogue, for example, in the various sections of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and at the same time with those in use by textual critics, without seeing that they are identical, and that textual criticism is a science. Thus, in textual criticism every interpreter of the Scriptures is compelled to familiarize himself at the outset with the principles of scientific reasoning.

Again, the *interpretation* of Scripture is a scientific process. It is an application, to the language of the Bible, of that knowledge of the human mind which is obtainable from examination of the literary products of the human race in all ages. It is to be regretted that more of our scientific leaders should not have had a broader literary culture, and it is to be feared that, in the opposition which in some quarters is made against classical study, the scientific world is likely to suffer serious loss. The legal profession, on the other hand, is devoted to the work of interpreting documents, and every lawyer's argument is a study in this branch of inductive investigation. The

same is equally true of every well-considered sermon or exposition of the Scriptures. The great work of the Christian teacher is to determine the meaning, and application to the present duties, of the various portions of the Bible. The work of interpretation proceeds under pretty well-defined rules determined by wide study of the human mind as revealed in the languages and literatures of the world. Starting with what we know of human capacity for communicating thought, the interpreter proceeds to form conclusions as to the intention of the writers whose language he has under consideration.

Thus, from beginning to end, in studying the fundamental evidences of Christianity, in determining the authenticity and integrity of the books of the Bible, and in interpreting the meaning of the language, the Christian teacher proceeds by scientific processes to the enlargement of the range of his belief concerning unseen and distant objects about which it is of the utmost importance that he believe something.

And here it is well for us to consider how essential it is for man to forecast the future in order to foresee the evil and fly from it, and also how this always has to be done on the basis of merely probable evidence. The chemist cannot perform an experiment without venturing thus on probabilities. How does he know that the ingredients he puts into the crucible are what they purport to be? In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is from blind confidence in the correctness of the labels which some unknown man has put upon them. The astronomer can make no progress without learning to put faith in the recorded observations of other astronomers. In the practical applications of science, such as forecasting the weather, and protecting ourselves from insidious diseases and epidemics, one is compelled to act upon a low degree of probability. It will not do to wait for absolute demonstration. The person who in human affairs refuses to act until all agnosticism is removed, will perish in his inac-

tion. Man is placed in a world where action on a bare preponderance of probability is often imperative, and the highest triumphs of science are those which enable him to determine that preponderance of evidence. Eminent scientific men have been known to abandon the practice of medicine because they could not be certain of the action of their remedies. But the world would be in a sad state, indeed, if such agnosticism were the goal of all scientific effort.

In connection with this question of the importance of probable evidence, the recent revival of interest in the subject of the origin of species is most opportune. Almost the whole weight of the influence of Mr. Darwin and his followers has been in the line of securing respect for probable evidence. For the most part, experiment has been out of the question with the Darwinians. It is wholly a matter of broad analogical reasoning. The numerous difficulties and objections presenting themselves can only be removed by the presentation of numerous subsidiary hypotheses. Mr. Darwin playfully said of himself, that he was a great adept at wriggling, but that Herbert Spencer was ten times as much a wriggler as he was. In this confession those cavillers are silenced who deride biblical interpreters for their use of hypotheses to evade the numerous difficulties urged against the Scriptures. The wriggings of the biblical interpreters are by no means so conspicuous as those of the defenders of the continuity of species.

It has already been remarked, that it seems miraculous that the character of Christ, as depicted by his followers, should not have been converted into a monstrosity. There are those, however, who assert that it has been so converted, and that the portraiture of the Christ of the Gospels is a monstrosity because of the miraculous elements that are made to enter into it. In the eyes of many, everything miraculous is a monstrosity, and is incapable of proof. Here the Christian apologist is more scientific

than the scientific agnostic. He who denies the provability of miracles because of his belief in their essential monstrosity claims a wider and deeper knowledge of the universe than any man has a right to claim. Such a universal negative as that miracles are impossible, or so improbable as to be incapable of proof, is incapable of demonstration. To maintain it one must deny the personality of the Creator, and ignore all the possibilities of the spiritual world; while the Christian apologist can produce abundant reasons for believing that miracles are necessary for the full revelation of the Creator's power and character.

Such, in brief outline, are the reasons for classifying the evidences of Christianity among the inductive sciences. The follower of Christ is essentially a lover of the truth, and a searcher after the truth. But it is after the loftiest truths within the comprehension of the human mind. The calculus by which he arrives at an adequate conception of these is obtained through the ordinary processes of inductive science. The Christian believer is of necessity a student of evidence. Through evidence he comes to believe in God, the Maker and benevolent Ruler of all things. In the exigencies of his own existence, in his sense of sin and need of redemption, he finds a reason for providing the world with a clearer revelation of God than appears in nature. Through evidence he is brought to believe in Christ as God manifest in the flesh, and as having all power on earth. He believes, on proper evidence, that Christ died and rose from the dead, and that he is, therefore, able to speak with authority concerning the heavenly world.

Christianity did not originate in any obscure corner of the earth. Its founders did not love deeds of darkness. But they walked in the light, and the history of the origin of Christianity is at the present time under such a blaze of light cast upon it by recent investigation that if it were false, the falsity could but be uncovered.

It is clear enough that the stately structure of Christianity is not built upon the sand. It rests upon a firm foundation of evidence open to scientific scrutiny. Such is the character of its facts, and so fully have they been subjected to examination that the believer need have no fear of any conflicting evidence. The message of Christ may be misinterpreted in minor parts, as scientific bodies are liable to misinterpret the testimony of nature. But the Christian believer may assert his rights as a member of the scientific fraternity, and as such should be generously hospitable to those who are making real discoveries of truth in other realms. And he may calmly rest in the assurance that every one who is of the truth—who is of a candid mind—will eventually see the glory, and the beauty, and the truth of Him whom the church universal worships and adores. Even the candid mind may pass through prolonged seasons of doubt, and may walk in darkness for a season, because of the imperfection with which the representatives of Christianity present its evidences. But he who seeks the truth, and commits himself to it, shall not forever remain in darkness. In due time the clouds will roll away, and with clear vision he shall see the exalted Son of God, and recognize him as the “way, the truth, and the life,” the light that “lighteth every man coming into the world.”